

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Terry Gorton – Experiences of Vietnam

By Terry Gorton

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Box 4 Folder 13

Oral Interview conducted by Travis Andersen

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

TA: This is Travis Andersen. I will be interviewing Terry Gorton, a BYU-Idaho faculty member of the English Department. Today is February 27th, 2004.

TG: The day after my birthday.

TA: That was our first question: When were you born? Where Brother Gorton, where were you born or where are you from.

TG: I am from upstate New York, a little town called Utica. I was born into a good Catholic family. I was the fourth kid of seven kids. I always like to say the day I was born my mother could hold me and say "I've got four boys now, and the oldest is two years old." So, I always add that nobody can accuse me of being a planned child." I figure I was definitely an accident.

TA: Nice! So, I understand that you served during the Vietnam conflict?

TG: I joined the army in 1973, while Vietnam was still going on. However, I joined the as a medic, with the idea that the war didn't make sense to me, but I didn't want to continue the job I was working. I just graduated from High School and I didn't feel like or had the money to go to college. And they were guaranteeing me any job that I qualified for at any location in the world I qualified for. And so a friend and I, George Mctushi was his name, whose probably in jail right now. We, to be honest with you, we just had a little too much to drink one night, and we both looked at each other, we both were sick of our jobs, and we heard about how they had just raised the salaries quite a bit in the army. And so he says, "Why don't we go down and join the army in the morning." Turns out we brought one friend with us, and we joined the army. And as a medic I had the GI bill ready for when I got out and I was guaranteed Germany. So I was an eighteen year old kid, I could throw grenades and go to Germany. It's hard to beat for an eighteen year old.

TA: What was the process of actually, to determine in what you qualified?

TG: They, after you, right your first week of your joint you take a battery of tests. It is part of the recruitment process actually. Based on the scores of those tests, they tell you whether or not you qualify for the jobs that you put on your wish list. It turns out I had no trouble qualifying to be a medic.

TA: Did you want to pursue that?

TG: That's a good question Travis. I had tinkered with the idea of going to med school, maybe eventually and joining, as a medic, could have been a preview for that. But, also A reason I joined the medic is so that if I went I wouldn't have to be a combatant. The Vietnam War didn't make a lot of sense to us. I thought if I was going to be a part of it, the best part I could was patching people up, everyone being a combatant. Which was kind of dopey, as I later learned in the Army because the medics ended up being as much

combatant as anyone else. They ended up being the main target for Vietcong. Kill a medic, you kill hundreds of people he could have saved.

TA: Wow, I didn't think of that. That makes sense. So, were you ever separated from friend? I can't remember his name.

TG: Good point. We went to basic training together. Had a good experience. We were both fairly lively in High School. When we went to basic training, we went to Fort Dix New Jersey together. And we went to Fort Sam Houston in Texas, the army's medical academy for our medical training, together. We both went to Germany together. Once we got to Germany he was in a unit in a different part of the country from where I was. I only visited him a couple of times after that. I visited one time just before he was kicked out for dealing drugs.

TA: Oh wow, that is going to lead us to one of our questions. So how long was your basic training?

TG: Basic training was about two months, and AIT, or advanced individual training, in Texas was also about two months. Each was about two months, just shy of two months. We rushed through basic a little quicker than a normal group would have, but it was about two months.

TA: Could you tell us a little bit about basic training as far as, was it physically demanding?

TG: It was. It turned out that our commanding officer, CO. Captain Murphy was his name. He looked like he was about eighteen years old; he may have been twenty-one just at a baby face, tall, lean. But he was determined that we would break the Army's physical fitness record. And so, we became this elite group suddenly. I think he may have seen some people in our group that looked like they could have done well. So he picked us, and in order to accomplish that, it seems to me, that they squeezed out some of the people that might not have kept up. I had a couple of friends that I had met while I was in basic training that kind of got squeezed out of the lower group. So we ended up breaking the PT record, physical training record.

TA: Which was?

TG: It would be. There were six different exercises that you had to do. You had to go pull across bars. There was just a horizontal row of bars and how fast you get across it four times. There were sit-ups in two minutes. There was something called an "inverted crawl," it was a two-mile run. Turns out we broke the record. It was a very good experience. I look back at it now, and I am amazed at the love actually, the drill sergeants, who pushed us so much, that they had. I am amazed at the friendships that you develop with other people who are going through such vigor together. And even though it was a very difficult situation, I'd look at it as a very happy time. Had some great experiences. I remember one drill sergeant...little, black drill sergeant, probably about

5'2", really stringy guy, M A C G E E, and uh M a c g e. It was the first time we stopped him. I remember the first time I saw him and you always got to call them by their name. And I said, "Drill Sergeant McGee, Sergeant McGee!" I remember his usual line, which I had never had a chance to hear until then, but heard it more since that day. He said, "Come here soldier." He says, "Look at me." He says, "Do I look Irish?" He says, "My name is Magee! Say it ten times! In fact, get down in the push-up position and say it twenty times." So, but the drill sergeants were pretty tough. But, you know, I look back and, you know, they were exercising all of their energy, helping us become good soldiers, and in becoming better men, and I look back and think that they were great teachers and facilitators to us as we go from punks to soldiers.

TA: Do you think your training prepared you to fight?

TG: Yes, good point. Because we were asked to do things, which we never would have, um, wanted to do or been able to do emotionally or physically. They worked us all hours of the night then get us up at four o'clock in the morning and have us do more work and get us to bed at twelve. They'd have us march until we couldn't hang on any more. So they obviously had as their goal to demand that we exceed our limits. And also, to follow order automatically, and they did a good job of that. I'd say I learned to follow orders very well, no matter how inconvenient it was for me. I also learned that my capacities were extended beyond, physically and emotionally etc., beyond where I had placed them before, before boot camp.

TA: So you served in Germany. Where at in Germany?

TG: I was in perhaps the most beautiful city on the planet, Bamberg, Germany. Northern Bavaria, not far from the Czech border, on the eastern part of Germany, south-eastern. We had a place called "Little Switzerland," not far from Nuremberg. The place I lived, had two major rivers running through it down from Bamberg. It was built on six different hills with cathedrals and cobblestone streets, just one of the most beautiful little cities on the planet. I spent a lot of time walking through those streets, and also some of the best beer anywhere in the world.

TA: That is what I hear!

TG: They had something called "rauche beer," specialized in Bamberg, Germany, smoked beer. In this little gast kas, and I can still taste it now, and I am a Mormon. And it has been...1973...it has been what, twenty nine years and it was absolutely delicious.

TA: So what was the purpose of that base there? Its involvement in the Vietnam War?

TG: As far as the Vietnam War, we uh, I...the only association I had with the Vietnam War were soldiers I met there who had returned from the Vietnam war, so I had some good friends in my unit who had gone to Vietnam war. In fact, I remember one sergeant who had been in the army about ten years. He went for three different tours in Vietnam, because where he was stationed was on the coast, in South Vietnam, away from the

fighting, and he was a medic, so he wasn't in the front action. But he said it was the whitest sand and bluest-greenest water anywhere in the world. He said it was the beautiful beaches you ever been to, and he liked it so much he went to three different terms. So my...also it turns out we had a cavalry unit, it was a very big base. We had a lot of troops and families there, and there was a cavalry unit, there were infantry units, and there were also artillery units. Every one of these units somehow had served in Vietnam. I was in the first armored division. The First Armor Division was very active in Vietnam. That is were all the other divisions in the army, so...but at the time that I'd joined nobody in that unit was sent to Vietnam. Once I got to Germany they had, the U.S. government had explicitly begun a policy of removing troops from Vietnam. The war officially ended in 1975, but I would say around 1973 everybody knew that we were retreating from Vietnam.

TA: How long were you there in Germany?

TG: I was in Germany for thirty-one and a half months. It was a three-year tour. So aside from basic training and my advanced training, I spent my entire time in Germany, didn't take, or in Europe, I had some leaves. But I didn't take any trips back home. So, you know it's just an eighteen-year-old kid. You know, first time away from the family. I spent those three years in Europe. I just decided if...I'm not going to have a chance to get to Europe, so if I get time off, I can't justify taking a plane back to New York. No matter homesick I may have been.

TA: Did you experience that?

TG: Well, I always like to tell my students many times. My first time there, my first day in Germany, I was walking down the hallway of a former panzer barracks from World War II. There is just huge high ceilings, these concrete floors, huge metal doors for each one of the rooms that we were living. And at the end of the hallway, was the medic. And as I got down there, some medic, I think his name was Kilobrew another Irish-black man it turns out. He had a mirror on his lap and a switch-blade in his hand, with about a four-inch blade something everybody had to buy when you get to Germany. I bought one a week later. He was taking, with the switch-blade, he was...he had a big pile of white powder on his mirror on his lap. He was taking that big pile of white powder and sectioning it into smaller piles of white powder to putting it them into little baggies and twist-tying it. We didn't have any of those automatic closures back then. He had some head-phones on just bea-boppin', door was wide-open. Turns out it was heroin. The medic who was hosting me, who was helping me find my room, introduced me to Kilobrew. Kilobrew and I, turns out later became good friends. Kilobrew took off his headphones, and twist-tied one of those plastic bags full of the purest heroin on the planet, and uh, threw towards me and said, "Freebee, for the new doc!" So I am holding pure heroin, that hadn't happened before. This goes along with your idea of about being homesick. What do you do? I was Catholic at the time, and I was a lapsed Catholic, didn't really have any religious inclinations. So, I can still see myself throwing it back saying, "No thank you." Later that week, some other of my future friends of the medics, invited me to go off base because prostitution was legal in Germany. I had to ask myself

why, why not? I just said, “No, I don’t think so.” I went back to my room and wrote a note to myself. Basically in the note I asked myself: “Aren’t we supposed to be comfortable in the world we are living in? Because I am not feeling very comfortable.” And then I continued to write, and I just said, “the world is becoming more violent, immoral, and selfish every day, and if I continue to try to be like the world, or try to stay comfortable, I will have to become more immoral, violent and selfish. Then I started talking about God in this little thing. I said, “God does not want us to be comfortable at that price. He will give us the power to be different from the world and still be comfortable.” So anyways, that big preface leads to what happened to me from that point on, which was I got hold of a New Testament, started reading it. Started saying the Rosary, which is how I prayed, “Our Father, and Hail Marries,” and just told the Lord that I like that power that I am sure he gives to be different from the world. Eventually, as I told you before, that prayer was answered in that feeble, meager prayer was answered, and I was able to find out about the church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and actually get baptized. Sorry for that long diversion.

TA: No, thank you for sharing. A comment or a question on drug use, it was very real there?

TG: Oh ya! Good question. See when I went to Vietnam, when I went to Germany in ’73, a lot of the people in Germany had come from Vietnam. And in Vietnam there was a lot of drug use. Because that was one of the ways that the enemy fought the Americans was to make sure that there was plenty of pure heroin available. And back in Vietnam because it was surrounded by Malaysia, Thailand, and some of the other producers, Afghanistan, of poppies. They flooded Vietnam with that, and it was very available and a lot of other, in addition to other drugs. So a lot of that, they would send them to Germany to wash them out before they would send them back to America. So there were a lot of drug use, and in some ways, they already winked a bit at drug use, because they know why they were using it. So for the first couple years there were drugs everywhere. Probably the most ramped drug was, what we call hashish, I’m sure it was in nearly every room of the barracks. Hashish was simply concentrated marijuana and THC, which they densified into a block, and then they soaked it with a heroin liquid, a heroin deteriorative.

TA: There were a lot of different drugs there.

TG: Yeah, they basically...the hashish is still quite fairly common. But, people would smoke this with water pipes and just nearly in every room of that barracks people would smoke this. As far as drug use, I got to tell you, even though I turned down that package of heroin that day. I shouldn’t use the word ‘even’ it makes it sound like I’m going to tell you later on I took it. So I strike down that word ‘even.’ But two weeks after I turned down that heroin, I was on duty at the dispensary. We were called to a unit, the barracks across the concern from me. A medic, an eighteen-year-old kid, I remember he part his hair down the middle. He’d wear a tie-dyed clothing when he was off duty. Just this skinny little kid from California. But he hadn’t been out of his room for two days. They were going to break the door down and they wanted us to be there when they got there. When we opened it. So we got there; they broke the door down and there was this kid,

kneeling against the foot of his bed and he had a needle stuck in his arm. He probably been kneeling there a couple of days. We put him on his back and his arms and legs just remained shooting toward the sky. Rigormortis had set in. We just broke each arm and leg and put him in a O.D. green body bag and zipped it up. So, there were drugs everywhere. After two years it turns out, Colonel Harry T. Ray, just this little tiny guy who had come from Berlin, and he was sent down to our company, our battalion actually. He became our Battalion leader. It became quickly obvious that his job was to clean us up. I took six months off. This was after I had been there a couple of years in Bamberg I took six months off to be a lifeguard it turns out in Southern Germany. So I applied for it, and everyone in my unit was very mad at me when I got it, but I got it. I went in there for six months, and when I came back a lot of friends that are drug dealers. And they had cleaned that place enormously. Turns out one of my best friends whose name Kurt Hufner. To see this little guy, it seems that I always telling you about a little guy, but this little guy from Queens, New York, who always carried new chuckers with him. He probably weighted one-hundred and twenty, hundred and fifteen pounds. But I would always used to hear about him getting in fights in all of these bars downtown, and just flattening out four or five people. But it turns out I had heard that he was a CID, criminal investigation division. So he was undercover. He looked, so he was actually a captain I heard, but he looked like he was about sixteen years old. I heard that he had put a lot of those people in Leavenworth. So it cleaned up a lot. By the time I left, and I am not taking any credit for this, but by the time I left it was mostly cleaned up. And it all took about six months, turns out while I was away. But it was night and day difference drugs, from the time I arrived in Germany in '73 by the time I left in '76.

TA: You mentioned that the military knew they were taking drugs, what were some of the reasons they were taking drugs?

TG: I suggested they may have winked at it, and with the idea that a lot of people had been involved in it during the whole time of the Vietnam. So I am suggesting it was a carry over from maybe a some typed of laxness, which probably occurred in Vietnam. You know, when you got eighteen-year-old kids getting shot at, even after they are told they can't win a war, you are confusing people quite a bit. I think that drugs were used a lot in Vietnam, and so they continued to be used a lot when I went in '73. I think they said you know we put these troops through a lot; we can't put them in jail after we got them addicted in Vietnam. I think that's part of it. I certainly think the military would prefer that the people didn't use drugs. But, like I said, when I got there it was everywhere. It was as easy to get a Coke out of a vending machine, and I am very serious about that. Also, you got to realize that we were at a cold war with East Germany and the Soviet Block, which were next door to Germany. And you can be sure that they had something to do with flooding Germany, especially the army barracks – U.S. Army barracks, with those drugs. Because it was a good way to impair, you know, their war – battle readiness. I think that played a part in it.

TA: Wow, Interesting. As a medic did you ever experience any of that were soldiers returning from Vietnam, did any of them suffer from...

TG: Post-traumatic syndrome?

TA: Post-traumatic stress syndrome.

TG: Good question. I guess my best answer would be no. The troops that I met, whether they were my drill sergeants or in Germany the non-commissioned officers or the other officers I knew seemed like great troops. Seemed like they; would be great people to go to war with. Seems like, you know, it was a very diverse population. You had Blacks, Latinos, you had Whites, you had Asians, a very diverse racial population. But, as far as the kind of people they were, and the way they carried themselves, I felt like the U.S. Army was in good hands. So I didn't see a lot of people, you know, essentially it was a peacetime rivalry when I was in Germany. The Vietnam War essentially was over. We did a lot of training and we did a lot of work where we go to some place called "Holenfelts" and Grafenvere. They were just huge tracks of German land which were given over to the Americans for training, and we did war games there. As far as the type of people I met, they were good. I look at those are the general, ones coming from Vietnam. In other words, the lifer sorts. As far as the eighteen-year-olds, like myself, who were only there just for a little while and a lot of the medics I worked with, were not your military types. It was obvious that many of them had joined for other reasons. By the time I went in it was volunteer instead of draft. So the people who were volunteer, which were the people there for less than three years were you know, the medics I knew, didn't seem like they belonged in the Army. They were a lot more interested in drugs and complaining and getting out of assignments. So I would distinguish those from the career soldiers, whether sergeants or officers and say there was a big difference. You know, they weren't bad people, but they weren't soldiers the ones that were the volunteers mostly.

TA: So the war was winding down. Was it during a peace time?

TG: There were people being killed in Vietnam. Americans were being killed in Vietnam. That was still happening. There were Vietnamese being killed by Americans in Vietnam.

TA: Did you experience any, like, were the soldiers, like were there any anti-war among the soldiers.

TG: Oh, good question. I would say that was not an issue, not in Germany. I would say that if ever there was any conversation about Vietnam war, and that was rare, then it may have been something to the effect, you know, the reason we're so confused over there is cause we were never allowed to win it. That was never an objective to win. And so, that was frustration. I remember having some of those conversations with friends who had been in Vietnam. When we were in basic training, the cadences and the chants that we would sing as we are marching were Vietnam related. "I want to be a Airborne ranger. I want to go to Vietnam. I want to be an airborne ranger. I want to kill some Vietcong." So I mean, I can still remember those. So the chants we would use were still Vietnam era chants. And as far as drill sergeants are concerned they treated us I'm sure, the same way

they treated people a year earlier, who they were training to go to Vietnam. So they were training us for a war. There certainly wasn't any bitterness and everybody knew the war was winding down. I don't think anyone disagreed with the policy at that point.

TA: Did you disagree or did you agree?

TG: With it winding down?

TA: No, with America's purpose of being there?

TG: No, you know, as an eighteen-year-old, and so the Vietnam War's heyday was over before, you know, I really had opinions about it. But, I would say when I was growing up in the..., I went to High School in '69. That was kind of intensive...that was a big time. I think thoughts would go through my head, initially, that we were trying to help people who were being overrun by Communists, by Communists from China and Russia. I believed that the people of the South...South Vietnam didn't want to become communists, and didn't want to be taken over by the North. So in that sense, I think initially the reason we were there was perhaps the same reason the French were there also before us, was a noble reason to try to help those people. I don't really think that's why America initially went there, and I think that in itself was not an immoral reason for being in Vietnam. But, the way we were conducting the war was destructive, ended up being destructive both to the people in the North and to South Vietnam, who were trying to help in many ways. If we had gone in there the same way we had fought every other war including most recently at the point in Korea, I think it could have turned out as noble and as courteous. I think the main problem with Vietnam is we had decided that we couldn't overrun the North. Because that could have gotten us involved with China and Russia both. We were constantly applying mandates to the flood that was coming down from the North in the propaganda. There was now way you could win that. So the more we fought with that kind of a strategy, the more futile our efforts were going to be and probably the more waste of time and life we were doing. But if we had gone there with the idea of winning, I think it would have a supportable war. As the way they fought it, I don't think it would be easy...you could support staying in Vietnam under that strategy.

TA: You talked about some activities that the soldiers busied themselves with, I guess, during their stay in Germany. What were some other forms of Entertainment you guys...?

TG: That is well put by the way. That is a good euphemism. We...good question. We did a lot of drinking. German beer was great. Like I said, Bamberg was a beautiful town. I would go, uh, I would spend a lot of time walking downtown. Again, beautiful cobblestone roads and just beautiful homes downtown and beautiful hills. I would walk along these rivers and see swans. It was just, for me it really was like being in a fairly tale. It was so gorgeous and beautiful, and the people were so wonderful, considering the Americans often were drunk and young and obnoxious. But there were also a lot of good American families who the Germans learned to love and appreciate. Especially the older

Germans knew we had saved them from World War II, so they appreciated Americans for that. The younger Germans didn't want us there as much I am sure. But, I drank a lot of German beer. My tendency was not to get drunk, but it's a very delicious product. Their food was great and I would go to these gast houses. And just go to different gast houses and sit down in the most beautiful atmospheres for restaurants you could imagine. In each, you know, we don't have these franchises. These are all individual restaurants in these buildings off these streets...cobblestone streets in Bamberg, Germany. The food was always great, just served with love. There was a Weiner schnitzel, Yeager schnitzel, Guner schnitzel, just every kind of schnitzel you can imagine. Rabbit. The food was wonderful. The brew was wonderful. They had things called volks marches, volks meaning people. They would have them every weekend. And I would go on a lot of those to see different little towns. And in every little town would just have like a five or ten K volks march, which means a three or six mile volks march. You just join with the German people. You just walk along these fields, and along these trails and in these woods. You get a little medal, you pay a couple of bucks, and they would give you a little volks march medal. A lot of people would collect them and put them in their books. They would also have sausages, wieners along with brew, beer along the path or at the end of the path we would sit and enjoy the company of the other people. Just a wonderful idea, I think we ought to do something like that in America a lot more, because it would unite the people, and you could see a lot of families and kids. Also, the army would make three-day passes a lot. You know, I'm in Europe so they would encourage you in a very economical way to go other places in Europe. You would get on a bus in Bamberg, Germany with a bunch of other people. I went to Holland. So I took a bus to Holland and there is a tour arranged. So I got to see cheese factories, got to take a canal ride in Amsterdam, I got to visit windmills. Just very well arranged. The Army was so good to the troops in so many ways. I will always say that. I also did the same thing to Paris, France. I took a skiing trip to Switzerland and Northern Italy. So I was able to do a lot of good things, while I was in the Army. Like I said, I spent six months in Southern Germany in the Bavarian Alps as a lifeguard. So the Army did a lot of good things. Also, probably the main activity I haven't got to yet. It turns out, at the PXs-the post exchanges-they had the best audio centers in the world, the army did. I would spend a lot of time just walking up to these audio centers, and they were multi-leveled. They have a floor just for speakers; a floor for tuners and amplifiers; a floor for recording equipment, and I would just decide what my perfect equipment was going to be. I would read all the audio magazines and everything. Most people had a beautiful audio system and so they would spend a lot of time in their rooms listening to stereo, because they end up buying these beautiful systems. And so, I would spend a lot of my time doing that.

TA: When you went to different countries, how did those people from the different countries receive American soldiers?

TG: When you are outside of Germany, you know when you go down to Italy or into Holland or France you don't have the basis that they did in Germany. You know Germany was very dense with an American basis. So when you went to those other places, they uh...I think most people liked Americans. And if you were cheerful to them, they were cheerful to you. I always had great experience with all the people I went to,

because I found out I was their guest and I treated them well and I was always treated well.

Really, take your time. I am in no hurry. Like I say it is good to get this stuff out.

TA: Ok, I want to hit on your religious beliefs. You mentioned before that you were Catholic, how did your beliefs help you in the war...in the service?

TG: Well, like I say, when I first got there...I used to be an altar boy. My mother was very Catholic; she would go to church-mass everyday at six-thirty in the morning. I went to an all boys Catholic school, Notre Dame High School. I always tell people I graduated from Notre Dame. I also would tell them I played football for Notre Dame, both which are true. Then later on I would tell them it was the High School. You know I endured Catholicism as most high school boys do, and then when I was out of the hospices of my parents I had no reason to go to mass. No reason to participate in religion at all. I certainly didn't pray, until I went to Germany and realized that I had to have a reason to act differently from how everybody else was acting. That's when I started thinking about religion. But I didn't actually become very religious until two years after I been in Germany, after I became acquainted with the church and joined.

TA: Did you know some LDS servicemen stationed in Germany?

TG: Good question. It turns out, when I was down in Southern Germany as a lifeguard, my brother Bob visited me. My older brother Bob he had joined the Army after I did, and came to Germany after I did. But it turns out he got religion, when he was back in the States going to a southern university. He decided after reading the Bible closely, that the true church was some place on the earth. And he wrote down all of the signs of the true church. Kind of like this Walt Weston tape they had played to me when I was convert. But he decided that the true church was on the earth and he decided to find it. So when he got to Germany, it turns out, a guy named...oh I can't remember his name. It is very important that I remember his name...Norm! Norman...I can't think of Norman's last name. But, Norman, who had joined the army as a lot of LDS kids, do to hide from a mission. Norman was in there with a couple of his buddies and Norman has since become a good Mormon. And so his buddies said, "hey, one of those guys over there has one of your books Norm!" Norman Pulson was his last name. They said, "why don't you go talk to him?" So Norm got up and talked to my brother Bob. He said, "I noticed you got a Book of Mormon." Brother Bob said, "ya, so what?" He said, "well I am a Mormon, and you are welcome to come to church." And Bob said, "I will think about it." But Bob did go to church; did read the Book of Mormon and became a Mormon. He came down and visited me, after I had been in the army for two years. Then something happened there which I could go into later perhaps. But, it turns out that this guy Norm came down also with Bobby, eventually. This good friend of my brother Bobby, and Norm was there at my baptism. So Norm got my brother baptized, and my brother Bobby eventually got me baptized. And after I'm out of the army, Norm left the army right after that. Didn't know what happened to him. I got out of the Army six months after that, worked for a year and a half, decided to go on a mission. I'm in the LTM in

Provo, now it is the MTC, and we were walking upstairs to meet our older group. Unbeknown to me there is a guy in the bathroom who is deciding that he tried to go on a mission a long time ago, didn't feel like it so he joined the army. No he was back going on a mission again. He was being sent to Belgium so he had to learn Dutch, and he couldn't learn the language, couldn't stand being around these younger kids because he is much older now. He told the Lord while he was standing in the bathroom, "unless you give me a good reason to stay on this mission, I am walking out of here and going home." It turns out he walked out of that bathroom and thing he saw was me. I said, "Norm, I mean Elder Pulsen!" He said, "Terry, I mean Elder Gorton!" We hugged each other. Then he told me what had happened in the men's room, and he decided that was a good enough reason to stay. Isn't that interesting?

TA: Wow, that is interesting!

TG: Small world! Anyways, the only other Mormon I knew, I didn't know he was a Mormon until after my brother Bobby told me he was. My brother Bobby had become a Mormon and I visited my brother Bob. He gave me a bunch of pamphlets and I told him I'd find out what he got involved in. So I went back to my unit and there was a guy I had known for over a year, his name was Wes Oliver. He was an older guy, probably mid-30s, and he acted like my brother did, after my brother became a Mormon. Meaning always going to church, and hanging out with these guys in their suits and ties and shaking hands. So I asked him if he was a Mormon and he said he was. And I said, "my brother Bob just became a Mormon." And I asked him if he could send over a couple of representatives so that I could ask them a couple of questions about what church my brother Bob had gotten involved with. Turns out, a couple of representatives showed up and I began taking the discussions. So that is the only Mormon I knew before joining the church.

TA: Serving there in the army, there in Germany?

TG: Well that was the only Mormon I knew period. I think that is the first Mormon I ever met in my life, as far as knowing that he was.

TA: How did the other soldiers treat him?

TG: Wes was a very...

TA: Like, did he stand out?

TG: Well, I take that back of what I said about not knowing any other Mormons. This is probably more to the point of that excellent question, "Did they stand out?" Wes was very friendly, a very good man, kind of cynical and jaded in some ways. But he was a little older than the rest of us in a lot of ways. He wasn't married and he wanted to be married. Of course, now that I know that he is a Mormon I know why. But there was another guy, when I went down to Southern Germany after two years in the Army to be a lifeguard. We were down there and...so I am in hiking boots and lederhosen instead of

an army uniform now, for six months in the middle of the summer on a Bavarian lake. No army base anywhere. But there was a hotel, and there were girls down there, and obvious it was a lot more relaxed, and a lot of drinking down there. But there was one guy down there named Mike. I wish I could remember his last name, but I don't. But Mike stood out. I remember he was kind of a reticent kind of a guy, but good worker. Always very helpful and friendly, but he wouldn't drink any beer. I remember offering him beers many times. "C'mon Mike!" You know I was one of those people who, I guess was tempting him. But he never would drink, until this one girl he got to like. I remember he would come to the bar rooms with us, but he wouldn't drink. I can remember, I can still remember the first time he took a drink how hard it was, but he started liking her and she drank. I remember how hard it was for him, but it got easier and easier. Anyways, it turns out at one time I was driving with him in his car back from a training operation in Barges Garden, Germany. By training I mean, learning to do lifeguard procedures. As we were returning...my brother had just visited me and left. My brother Bobby had told me he had become a Mormon. So I am one with Mike, and Mike mentioned he was from Utah, from Salt Lake. I said, "Oh you are from Utah." He goes, "Ya." I said, "Aren't there a lot of Mormons in Utah." He goes, "Ya, there are." I said, "You know Mike, my brother Bobby just became a Mormon." And I said, "I kept trying to get him to drink, but he refused to drink." I said, "But I noticed you drink beer." And I said, "what is the rule on that? Can some Mormons drink beer and other Mormons can't drink beer, or is there a general rule?" I remember him looking at me weird and shaking his head and said, "No. No Mormon should be drinking beer and I shouldn't be drinking beer." I remember he didn't want to talk anymore about it. So there is one experience with a guy who really stood out. And I think Mike is probably doing fine. You can tell he is a sharp guy. I think he probably straightened himself out. I would like to meet him again and see.

TA: How did your family react to you serving in the army, being in Germany, being away from home, and then how did they react to you actually, becoming LDS?

TG: I think Mom...my parents were probably happy with my decision. They know I wasn't going to Vietnam, chances were. They knew I was going to get the G.I. Bill. They knew I was going to get to go to Germany. I think they thought it was a good decision. I remember my uncle saying that if you hadn't join the army I probably would have been in jail. I don't think I would have a gone a while. He called me Sergeant York. He said I had a religious conversion like Gary Cooper did when I went into the Army. The Army was a good decision I think, whether they liked it. Becoming a Mormon on the other hand was not something they liked to much. Fortunately for me my brother Bobby joined first. So he had Father Finigan and Father Flanigan from our Lady of Lord's Parish write him letters provoked by my mom. But I was the first one to actually go home, because he had joined the Army after I did. So he joined the church first, but I went home first. When I went home, I took my parents to the church. I remember my father in the hallway taking out his tobacco pouch and his pipe. I had lost track of him for a second. When I turned around he just about to light up his pipe in the Mormon hallway. That would have been a first. I said, "Dad, Dad hold it!" But anyway, I had home teachers then too, who my mother met. Her point...her judgment on the

Mormons was, I remember she said, "Terry, if all the people lived like the Mormons I have met then the world would be a good place." She got good examples and she was very happy with the way the Mormons lived. She also said about me that all she ever wanted was her kids to be happy. She said, "I can tell you are happy and I can tell you are living a good life. You were a much better Mormon than you were a Catholic." In that sense, she thought that it was a good decision. Both decisions were good decisions. She helped me on my mission. She helped support me on my mission and it wasn't...financially it wasn't easy for her. And my father for that matter.

TA: You mentioned your brother was serving in the army later on.

TG: He joined about a year and a half after I did.

TA: How did you guys keep in Contact? Letters?

TG: While we were both in Germany?

TA: Yes.

TG: We didn't keep in contact much. He visited me after he had been in Germany for several months, when he came down and visited me. Then I visited him a few months later because it was his birthday. There may have been one or two other times we may have seen each other. We didn't see much...we certainly didn't write to each other. Oh, actually I wrote to him one letter I still have a copy of. I wrote to him where I said, "Bob I read the Book of Mormon you gave me. I'm convinced it's true and I'd like you to come baptize me." So I still have a copy of that letter. I guess once in a while we would write.

TA: As a return...or as a veteran of the Vietnam War or conflict...

TG: No...Vietnam Era...I think that is what they say it.

TA: Have you been treated differently?

TG: No absolutely not. I think almost that anybody that knows I've...somebody that has been in the army is curious and probably thinks that the experience has been good for that individual, in this case good for me. I think certainly at BYU or whatever people haven't met many people who were in the army. We are mostly curious. When I tell my students today, I always tell them the main reason people join the army is so they can have stories to tell when they get out. So I'd say I haven't got any flack about having been in the army while in Vietnam war was going on. From people from Utah or from New York or my friends, you know when I left the army people thought it much more strange and curious that I had become a Mormon than that I had been in the army. It was much more dramatic for them.

TA: How has Vietnam affected you?

TG: I really haven't had any direct connection with Vietnam. I would say...

TA: The event I guess.

TG: The event...I would say it was a historical event. It turns out I have three older brothers but none of them went to Vietnam. Even though they would have been prime as far as the time of their lives, but in each case they go by birthdays. That is how the Lottery works. Three hundred and sixty-five different balls were in the lottery based on each state that is how they did it. In all of my brother's case, their lottery was in the three hundreds or so. And they never took that many birthdays for the draft. So, my family didn't go. I never had any friends or associates who died in Vietnam that I know of or knew. My older brothers may have. So, I would say the Vietnam War has not really had much of an effect on me. Maybe I training...good training by people who had been trained in Vietnam, so I was probably a better soldier because of the Vietnam War. I have already told you what my opinions were. I would say that I was affected the same way our county has been affected. And that is that we are a little bit ashamed and a little bit guilty about how we conducted that war. We compromised position. We put soldiers as well as Vietnamese in because of the way we conducted the war. I think that I have been affected the same way all Americans have been affected and that is you don't conduct a war unless there to win. If you are there for any other reason, then you are magnifying the horrors of war.

TA: Do you think about your experiences there often?

TG: Oh yeah. There is no question. It was a wonderful decision. It was extremely valuable. I did a lot of growing up. Now question I was a punk when I went in, and I grew up a lot. I was very undisciplined when I was in High School. I learned discipline. I learned a lot about myself. I learned a lot about how to work with people...my limits and capacities. Obviously, I was a medic so I received some great training. I read the most important thing of course is that I made the decision to join the LDS church while I was in the Army. In the army I couldn't sit on the fence. Good things...good things happened to me in the army, but a lot of bad things happen to people in the army too. They went downhill also. I think the army is a place where you have trouble just sitting on the fence. Either you do grow up and you straighten out, or you become worse. But I think what the army does is put you in a laboratory where those decisions have to be certified in ways that they didn't have to be in another environment. It provoked you one-way or the other. A lot of people became more drug-infested in the army. But I would say most cases I think the army is a good thing for an eighteen-year-old kid. I would say that a lot of our society is vastly improved at all levels because eighteen-year-old kids who weren't going to college, didn't like their jobs and had nothing much to do in their lives, got a chance through the army to learn discipline, to learn how to work, to learn a skill, to learn to grow up. So I have nothing but praise for what the army makes available for young people. The opportunities...the structure, I think there are a lot of White, Black, Latino, Asian, you name it, kids lives who have been saved. What a great opportunity for kids who have a dead end.

TA: That concludes all of my questions. Thank You.

TG: Thank You.